

Fern Hill



SUMMARY

Well, when I was young and relaxed under the branches of the apple trees that surrounded the happy house, and my happiness was as vivid as the intense green of the grass—as vivid as the night's stars over the valley's trees—time himself let me live, call out, and climb, watching as I thrived and flourished in the best days of my life. I was highly respected among the wagons and was the prince of the local towns full of apple orchards. Back then, I was like a king who made the trees and their leaves spread trails of daisy flowers and barley grass on the fields behind them, where the apples blown down by the wind were like a river of light.

And I was young, inexperienced, and had no responsibilities, I was a celebrity around the barns and in the joyful yard, and I sang all over the farm because it felt like home. Under the sun, which is young only once, time allowed me to play and feel golden—at least as far as his mercy and resources allowed. Young, inexperienced, and thriving, I was like a hunter or shepherd. When I blew my trumpet the young cows sang back to me and foxes on the nearby hill barked sharply. The sabbath—the holy day—seemed to ring out slowly from the pebbles in the streams, which seemed holy as well.

I'd spend the whole, lovely day running about. Farmers had stacks of hay as high as the house's roof, and the smoke from the chimneys was like a song. The days were full of fresh air and play, beautiful and flowing. The fire was as green as the grass. Every night under the stars I didn't just fall to sleep, I *rode* to sleep, and the owls seemed to carry the farm away with them as they took flight. All the moonlit night I could hear the blessed nightjars—nocturnal birds—near the horse stables, flying around the stacks of hay. Light gleamed on the horses' hair before they disappeared into darkness.

And then I would wake up. The farm seemed to return in that moment, like a wandering person shining with morning dew, a rooster on his shoulder. Everything was shining, in fact; it was like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The sky returned and the sun rose again, right then and there. This is what it must have been like when God created the world, making the first light over the spinning earth. The first horses would have been mesmerized by what had happened, walking out of their green stables, which were full of their neighing, and into the warmth, into the fields where everything was praising God.

I was also a celebrity among the foxes and the pheasants (a type of bird) near the happy house under the newly-formed clouds. My heart was filled with happiness, in the light of that sun that rose again and again. I ran without a care, all my desires running with me between the tall stacks of hay. And I didn't care at

all—as I went about my tasks, which were blue as the sky—that time, with all his beautiful music, doesn't allow people to have very many songs of childhood. Soon, children, inexperienced and full of joy, have to follow time out of their innocence.

But I didn't care, in those days when I was innocent as a lamb, that time would lead me to the attic that was full of swallows (a type of bird), guiding me by my hand's shadow—all in the light of the moon that seems to keep rising and rising. And I didn't care that as I went to sleep I would hear time flying over the fields, and that when I woke up the farm would be gone and there would be no more children. Oh! When I was young and happy in the short childhood that I was granted, time embraced me, still young and inexperienced but already dying, even though I was locked in chains, singing like the sea.



THEMES



CHILDHOOD'S JOY AND INNOCENCE

"Fern Hill" is first and foremost a celebration of childhood. The speaker's rich descriptions center around childhood's happy innocence, the way children feel like a unique part of a harmonious world—a world in which everything is special yet works together. The speaker suggests that to be a kid is to experience such specialness and harmony, such feelings of simultaneous freedom and security.

The poem brims with positive descriptions of the speaker's childhood at Fern Hill (an aunt's farm that Thomas often visited as a child), indicating how the speaker looks back on these experiences as a time of joy and innocence. For instance, the speaker begins the poem by describing how "easy" life felt as a child, saying "I was young and easy under the apple boughs." This doesn't necessarily mean that the speaker *had it easy*, so to speak. Rather, the speaker felt *at ease* at Fern Hill. In other words, there was no friction between the speaker and the rest of world.

The speaker compares this feeling of harmony to being "prince of the apple towns." This might suggest that the speaker felt like the ruler of the local towns that produce apples. More to the point, however, it captures how the speaker felt special, "famous among the barns," as a child, as though the entire world itself was paying attention to him.

Such a feeling conveys the speaker's joyful, innocent attitude; there was nothing to fear or dread, and instead days were filled with excitement and wonder. The speaker saw only good in the surrounding world, describing how "my wishes raced through the house high hay." In other words, the whole farm seemed to grant the speaker's wishes. To the young speaker, everything

was sweet and fun, fulfilling all the speaker's desires. The speaker was free from all worries and cares, instead allowed to simply enjoy the splendor of the world.

By recollecting childhood in such vivid terms, the speaker reveals how it shines forth in memory as a truly wonderful time. As a child, the speaker felt harmonious in a world where a kid could be "famous among the barns." Everything was special, and the speaker had all that could be asked for.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-46



THE HARMONY AND WONDER OF NATURE

The speaker's childhood joy is closely connected to his experiences playing outside. Childhood happiness, the poem suggests, comes in part from feeling a strong sense of connection with the natural world. To be young and innocent is to be one with nature, the poem suggests—and the natural world itself is presented as a place filled with wonder, peace, and harmony.

Throughout the poem, the speaker emphasizes how close he felt to nature as a child. "I was green and carefree," the speaker says, for example. The word "green" refers to being young and inexperienced, but it's also a [metaphor](#) here, comparing someone to a green shoot or stick (i.e., young plant growth). As a child, the speaker was like a young plant that didn't have a care in the world because it was just so excited to be alive. The speaker returns to the word "green" throughout the poem, repeatedly suggesting that children are as much a part of nature as leaves or newly sprouted plants.

The speaker also describes this time as "lovely" and full of "playing." "All the sun long it was running," says the speaker, making it sound as though the day itself would run along with him, like a friend might. The speaker also evokes "tunes from the chimneys" and calls the surrounding air "lovely and watery." As the young speaker explored the landscape, all the elements of that landscape seemed like his playmates; the sun, hay, smoke, air, and water would also frolic and sing.

As these descriptions accumulate, the speaker's childhood seems at one with nature. Rather than just playing in nature, the speaker plays as *a part of it*. For example, the speaker says, "I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves / Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold." The speaker, as a child, felt like both a hunter and shepherd in this landscape. It's not that the speaker was killing or protecting things, but that the speaker had a role to play; it felt as if all these animals responded to the speaker. Again, then, the speaker's childhood joy stemmed in large part from feeling in harmony with the natural world.

The feeling of being a part of the landscape even extended to nighttime: "And nightly under the simple stars / As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away." Here, the elements of the landscape all get mixed up, so that the flying owls seem to carry the farm away and the speaker seems to ride them! In this description—and many others like it throughout the poem—the speaker and elements of the landscape seem to blend together. Night, then, captures the height of the speaker's joyful connection with the natural world. Child, owl, barn, stars all swoop through the world as part of each other.

It's clear that the speaker remembers childhood as a time of joyful romping through nature. That joy was the result of feeling like a part of the landscape, rather than apart *from it*. And adulthood, the poem argues in the end, is incompatible with such feelings; the joyous "farm" of the speaker's youth has since "forever fled from the childless land." Adults are no longer able to access the sense of peace and harmony that comes from being one with nature—they are effectively kicked out of this Eden.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-3
- Lines 6-12
- Lines 15-54



THE POWER OF TIME

Throughout "Fern Hill," time looms as a godlike presence. Time grants the speaker a brief period of childhood happiness, yet it also ensures that nothing lasts forever and that all joys come to an end. Ultimately, the poem presents time as an unstoppable force with control over human beings.

Very soon after the poem begins, the speaker personifies time as an all mighty figure. This figure mercifully grants the speaker a brief period of childhood, while also looming over that childhood with the threat of imminent change. In the first stanza, the speaker describes time as a kind of god that "let[s]" the speaker experience a joyful childhood: "Time let me hail and climb / Golden in the heyday of his eyes." Here, time almost seems like a giant in whose eyes the speaker can "climb." This [metaphorical](#) description captures how time enables people to have childhoods in the first place. Without time, there'd be no "heyday" to "climb" in.

In fact, this personified time is merciful for allowing childhood to exist. "Time let me play and be / Golden in the mercy of his means," says the speaker. Time grants the speaker a "golden" childhood, but only has enough "mercy" to provide a short one. The speaker has a keen sense of how time only permits people to be children for so long. Pretty soon, the time's up.

As a result, time as a personified figure represents a looming

sense of change. However, as a child, the speaker didn't fully comprehend childhood's brevity: "And nothing I cared [...] that time allows [...] so few and such morning songs." In other words, the speaker didn't know or didn't care that childhood would be over so soon, that time is merciful only up to a point. This ignorance further highlights the inevitability *and* surprise of time's passage. Everybody knows they're going to grow up, and yet, somehow, it still comes as a surprise when it actually happens.

Presiding as an all-powerful force throughout the poem, time gives the speaker a wonderful childhood and then takes it away. Both predictable and unrelenting, there's nothing that can be done about the passage of time.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 4-5
- Line 7
- Lines 13-14
- Line 39
- Lines 42-54



THE END OF CHILDHOOD GRACE

When nature runs its course, the poem implies, children grow up, losing the "grace" of childhood.

According to Christianity, grace is the experience of God's love and an awareness that all of God's creations are good. For the speaker, childhood represents such an experience, and the end of childhood is thus a painful fall from grace.

The speaker often frames the goodness of childhood through [allusions](#) to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. This religious lens captures how the speaker remembers childhood as a paradise akin to the Garden of Eden. For instance, the speaker describes waking up to the world covered with dew as "all / Shining, it was Adam and maiden." This moment explicitly compares the speaker's childhood memories with the story of Adam and Eve, revealing that the speaker thinks childhood is like being in the Garden of Eden.

In Eden, the story goes, Adam and Eve felt at one with everything around them. They tended to the garden, felt no shame, and knew nothing of evil. The speaker imagines childhood feeling a lot like being in Eden: "So it must have been after the birth of the simple light / In the first, spinning place." In other words, living in the newly created world must have been a lot like being a kid at Fern Hill.

Understood through the lens of Christianity, the speaker's memories are filled with "grace." The Christian idea of grace has a lot of meanings and resonances, but in terms of this poem it can be roughly summed up as being close to God, just as Adam and Eve were. For the speaker, childhood itself is grace. All the speaker's experiences of feeling special, of sensing the harmony

of the world, are part of that grace. For the speaker as a child, the world's divinity can be seen even in the humblest stones; "And the sabbath rang slowly / In the pebbles of the holy streams," the speaker says. In this state of grace, the speaker can see that the whole world is good, that it is all full of God's divinity.

At the end of the poem, the speaker loses the grace of childhood just as Adam and Eve lost their grace, and along with it the paradise of Eden. This experience is very painful for the speaker. The last lines of the second-to-last stanza describe how "the children green and golden / Follow [Time] out of grace." Just as Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden, the speaker "wake[s] to the farm forever fled from the childless land." It's as if one day the speaker wakes up, no longer a child, and all the joy has been sucked out of the world. The speaker doesn't feel connected to the world anymore, either. Instead, all paradise and harmony has been removed, leaving the speaker alone.

Moreover, just as Adam and Eve could now experience physical and emotional pain, the speaker now knows suffering. The poem ends on a dramatic and mysterious image that captures this suffering: "Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea." This image of a dying, enchained sea conveys the pain of childhood ending. Put simply, it feels awful. Thus bleakly ends the speaker's depiction of childhood's grace. Now, like Adam and Eve, the speaker feels the pain of losing that "green and golden" paradise.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-54



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

*Now as I ...
... grass was green,*

"Fern Hill" is based on Dylan Thomas's childhood experiences at his aunt's farm of the same name. Rather than describe this subject in a straightforward manner, however, Thomas use extravagant language to evoke his memories. In the process, the poem transforms autobiographical material into a general celebration of a childhood spent outdoors. But by the end, the poem has become a lament for the loss of childhood as people grow up.

This language in this poem is characteristic of Thomas. It's a swirl of [imagery](#), sounds, impressions, and [allusions](#) that isn't always meant to be taken literally. A poem like "Fern Hill" wants to sweep its reader of their feet, transporting them through a dreamy realm on a journey guided by emotion and imaginative associations. The first step in getting to know a Dylan Tomas

poem is to enjoy it, to bask in the poem's sumptuous intensity and its sense of beauty. That said, it is still totally possible to talk about this poem. In fact, there's a lot to say!

The poem begins with the speaker's memory of a typical day at Fern Hill. The speaker lounges "under the apple boughs." Nearby is the "lilting house." The speaker is "happy as the grass was green." These two phrases, "lilting house" and "happy as the grass was green," both use the kind of associative poetic logic that the speaker will turn to throughout the poem. That is, they blend different senses together to create a vivid impression of the speaker's feelings.

"Lilting" means singing or speaking with a gentle rising-and-falling sound. A house that sings isn't a literal image, and this isn't going to be a literal poem. Rather, these early lines hint at how the poem exists in its own universe of richly [metaphorical](#) descriptions, where a house can be so wonderful that it sings.

The [simile](#) "happy as the grass was green" suggests that the intensity of the speaker's happiness matches the vividness of the grass. Again, senses blur together, so that an emotion (happiness) and a color (green) can be compared to each other, or even fuse into the same thing. This blurring or fusing suggests that the speaker's inner world of emotions and outer world of natural sights are all mixed up together in the poem's heightened version of reality.

The poem begins, "Now as I was young." This "Now" is interesting because it evokes the present tense, while the rest of the poem is in the past tense ("I was"). Of course, "Now" can be interpreted [idiomatically](#) here, like beginning a sentence with *Now then*, or *Well*, or *So guess what*. It's a way of getting someone's attention and introducing a train of thought. The speaker mines the richness of this idiom, using it to draw attention to another kind of blurring, this time between past and present. Throughout the poem, the speaker will bask in wonderful memories of the past—memories that almost seem like the present.

These two lines, along with the rest of the poem, are structured syllabically. *Syllabics* is a formal constraint that modernist poets like Dylan Thomas often used to structure their poems in place of [meter](#). A poem written using syllabics adheres to a certain number of syllables per line, rather than to a certain number of stresses as in traditional meter. These first two lines have 14 syllables each. This establishes a pattern that the first two lines of each stanza will follow.

LINES 3-5

*The night above ...
... of his eyes,*

Line 3 continues the comparison between the speaker's happiness and the natural world. As a child, the speaker was as happy as "The night above the dingle [was] starry." A dingle is a forested valley. As a child, the speaker had as much happiness

as the sky had stars.

The next two lines in the poem are even more [figurative](#):

Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,

These lines are incredibly evocative and about as far from literal as can be. Although it takes a second to articulate exactly what the speaker's saying, the impression these lines give is unmistakable: childhood was a great time. Registering that impression, its positivity—the sense of a kid gleefully climbing—is essential to the poem.

Here, the speaker uses a combination of [personification](#), [metaphor](#), and the kind of blurring that appeared in the previous lines. First, "Time" appears as a godlike figure, personified on a cosmic scale so that "his eyes" are "heydays." A heyday is a period of time when something or someone was at their best (note also the pun on "hay," which appears throughout the poem). "Golden" also suggests the idea of a "golden age," or a time of particular joy and prosperity.

Personified time's eyes are such periods—a metaphorical description that suggests the whole landscape of the speaker's childhood is like an "eye[]" of time. Furthermore, the speaker can "climb" in such heydays/eyes. Interpreted literally, this conjures the image of a young, "Golden" child climbing in giant, godlike eyes. More to the point, though, captures the adventure and joy of childhood.

LINES 6-9

*And honoured among ...
... the windfall light.*

In the last four lines of the first stanza, the speaker evokes the magic of being a kid on a farm. First, the poem captures how the speaker felt special on the farm, like a "prince" or a "lord[]." "And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns," says the speaker. This line captures the charm of how children are capable of transforming humble things with their imaginations. "[W]agons" and "apple towns" aren't usually associated with royalty, but the speaker feels princely around them.

The thick [consonance](#) brings the [imagery](#) to life, imbuing the lines with rhythm and music. Note, for example, the /p/, /l/, and long /ee/ sounds in these lines:

[...] I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and
leaves

In the next line, the speaker says "And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves / Trail with daisies and barley." The phrase "once below a time" is a riff on the more common "once upon a time." What does it mean to be "below" a time, rather than "upon" a time? Perhaps the speaker is thinking about

digging up a memory, or perhaps this is simply a reflection of the speaker's unique and imaginative point of view as a child.

As a "lord[]" the speaker creates trails of daises and barley grass around the trees. In the context of such magical powers, the word "lordly" suggest the Christian use of the word Lord to refer to God. Like God walking through the Garden of Eden, the speaker creates life and beauty wherever he goes.

These flowers and grasses create trails "Down the rivers of windfall light." The word "windfall" refers to apples that have been knocked to the ground by the wind. Characteristically, the speaker uses blurry [metaphorical](#) language to enrich this image. Turning "windfall" into an adjective that describes the light, this light in turn becomes a river. One might imagine a whole crowd of apples, gleaming in the light, rolling down a hill like a river.

LINES 10-14

*And as I ...
... of his means,*

The second stanza [parallels](#) the first stanza in several ways. The speaker talks about how happy childhood was before again invoking "Time" as a godly figure. The speaker begins:

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the
barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was
home

The word "green" is an [idiom](#) that describes being youthful and inexperienced. It also [metaphorically](#) compares youths to the shoots of young plants. This comparison links children with nature, suggesting that children and plants aren't so different—that kids running around in nature are basically a *part of nature*.

Again the speaker compares the joy of running around in nature to a princely feeling, to being "famous among the barns." This description combines the humble and the mighty, capturing the magic of a child's imagination. "Fern Hill" is built around a lot of [repetition](#) and [parallels](#), such as this phrase, so that the poem comes to be a swirling, circling series of memories and impressions.

For instance, the speaker repeats the word "happy," which appeared in the second line of the first stanza, in the second line of this second stanza. Similarly, the "lilting [i.e., singing] house" is echoed by "singing as the farm was home." These echoes reinforce the importance of a few key concepts/images: singing, happiness, home, and the magic of humble things. Additionally, these repetitions capture how memory—and in particular nostalgia—is itself repetitive, continually returning to the same impressions and events.

The third to fifth lines of this stanza reintroduce the role of time:

In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means

Restating how time allows the joys of youth to exist in the first place, the speaker also hints out how those joys are fleeting. First, "the sun that is young once only" mirrors how people only get to be young once; growing up is permanent. Then, the speaker references "the mercy of [time's] means." In other words, the generosity or resources that time had to spare: time allows people only as much childhood as it can afford to give them.

This phrase, "the mercy of his means," can also be interpreted more cynically. On this interpretation, people are at the mercy of time, which stingily doles out meager childhoods. Either way, the speaker clearly looks back on childhood as a wonderful time that was too short.

These lines parallel the corresponding lines in the previous stanza extremely closely. This is stanza 1:

Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,

And this is stanza 2:

Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,

As with the previous instances of repetition, this emphasizes the importance of the sentiments expressed in these lines. Additionally, "golden," along with "green," comes to be a very important, oft-repeated word throughout the poem. Whereas "green" suggests youth's naiveté and harmony with nature, "golden" conjures its joy, magic, and princeliness.

LINES 15-18

*And green and ...
... the holy streams.*

Right off the bat, the speaker repeats "green and golden" in the last four lines of the second stanza:

And **green** and **golden** I was huntsman and
herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear
and cold,

These words summon a joyful, royal, magical, idyllic feeling. The speaker compares this feeling to being "huntsman and herdsman," that is, a hunter and a shepherd (or cowherd). The speaker doesn't actually hunt or herd animals. Rather, the animals respond to the speaker as if he has a role to play in their world. The young cows sing in response, and foxes on nearby

hills bark. These initial lines, then, capture how the speaker feels like a special part of the natural environment of the farm.

The use of [alliteration](#) in these lines contributes to this feeling of connection by adding some harmony of its own. The phrases "green and golden," "huntsman and herdsman," and "clear and cold" all contribute an emphatic musicality to these lines, capturing the speaker's enthusiasm for being out among calves and foxes.

The final two lines of the stanza introduce a new, overtly religious tone:

And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

The sabbath is the holy day in Judaism and Christianity. The suggestion that the sabbath "rang slowly / In the pebbles" is a totally [metaphorical](#) description. The speaker compares a holy day to a ringing sound, like a church bell. In turn, that ringing sound seems to come from the tiny stones at the bottoms of streams.

This description suggests that the speaker doesn't just view Fern Hill as a place of childhood fun, but also as a holy place. Part of the speaker's nostalgia for this time, then, is nostalgia for such holiness.

LINES 19-22

*All the sun ...
... green as grass.*

In the third stanza, the speaker again begins by evoking fun times at Fern Hill, emphasizing how the farm's landscape is part of that fun:

All the sun long **it was** running, **it was** lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house,

The phrase "All the sun long" means that the speaker was enjoying being outside all day, as long as there was sunlight. The [repetition](#) of "it was" then refers more specifically to what things were like for the young speaker. The days were full of running, especially when the hay had grown really high. Hay can be made from a variety of grasses that are grown their full heights and fed to livestock. Here, the speaker runs through fields of grass that has probably grown taller than the speaker.

Next, the speaker evokes "tunes from the chimneys." This echoes the phrases "lilting [i.e., singing] house" and "singing as the farm was home" from the previous stanzas. As with those instances, this phrase creates a kind of [metaphorical](#) blurring of different senses. The sight of smoke from the chimneys blurs with the sound of music, so that the smoke itself seems to be streams of "tunes."

Similarly, the following lines blur together "air," "playing,"

"lovely," and "watery," so that the air seems like a kind of water full of wonderful things. For the child's play to have been "watery" also suggests it was flowing, fluid; something that felt easy and endless.

That "watery" feel then comes up against another natural element, as the speaker deems "fire green as grass." Here's the color green again. This echoes the phrase in line 2, "happy as the grass was green." That first phrase compared the intensity of the speaker's happiness to the intensity of the grass's green color. Now, however, the speaker says that the fire itself is as green as the grass.

This description is totally *surreal*—that is, an imaginative distortion of reality that somehow seems more real than real. Surreal images are often associative, meaning they rely on blurry and subconscious connections in the writer's and reader's mind, just as so many of the images in this poem do. This particular image captures how vivid childhood felt to the speaker, and how vivid its memories still are. As a kid, things weren't necessarily logical, but they certainly were alive.

LINES 23-27

*And nightly under ...
... into the dark.*

In the second part of stanza 3, day turns to night. For some writers, night can be a time of isolation; for others, it conjures a feeling of oneness with the rest of world, a sense of everything dissolving together in the darkness. The speaker definitely falls into the latter camp.

The speaker doesn't *fall asleep*, but *rides to sleep*. As owls take flight, "bearing the farm away" (that is, carrying the whole farm with them), they seem to carry the speaker as well. It's as if sleep dissolves the speaker's body, allowing the speaker to fly with the owls.

Night sounds transport the speaker as well. "All the moon long," says the speaker, "I heard [...] the nightjars." Nightjars are nocturnal birds that eat insects. They make a chirring noise. As they fly among the stables and "ricks," or stacks of high, the speaker can hear them.

Miraculously, the speaker can also hear "horses / Flashing into the dark." This [imagery](#) evokes light gleaming on horses' hair one last time before they retreat into the shadows of their stable to sleep. By [metaphorically](#) describing this visual image as something that can be heard from all the way in the speaker's room, the speaker captures how everything seems connected at night—how the sounds of owls or nightjars can transport one away from one's body, so that even the shadowy movements of horses in their stables becomes visible.

The use of the word "blessed" in line 24 ("All the moon long I heard, **blessed** among stables, the nightjars") continues hinting at religious undertones. In a Christian context, "blessed" means that something has been favored by God, or that it is a sign of

God's favor. The nightjars are "blessed" meaning that God is looking after them and that they are a sign of good things for the stables. Just as the speaker is "famous among the barns," the nightjars are similarly revered: "blessed among stables."

LINES 28-32

*And then to ...
... that very day.*

In the fourth stanza, day returns. As is characteristic of the poem, the speaker describes dawn in highly [metaphorical](#) language. After owls [figuratively](#) "were bearing the farm away" at night, now the farm comes back. In other words, it reappears as light shines on it. With dew everywhere, the farm gleams, is "all / Shining."

The speaker [personifies](#) the farm as "a wanderer white / With dew," a traveler suddenly appearing after the night. This traveler has a "cock [a rooster] on his shoulder," suggesting how the day on the farm begins with a rooster crowing at dawn.

Next, the speaker pivots into an important biblical [allusion](#) that begins to clarify the poem's religious undertones. The speaker says, "it was Adam and maiden." This refers to the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible. According to this story, Adam and Eve were the first humans, created by God to live without any knowledge of evil, shame, or guilt. They dwelt in a paradise called the Garden of Eden, where they lived in harmony with all the plants and animals.

By invoking this story, this speaker implies that Fern Hill is like the Garden of Eden, a paradise where a child feels at one with the natural surroundings. In the fourth and fifth lines of the stanza, the speaker describes the sky in terms that suggest the beginning of the world as it might have been witnessed in Eden: "The sky gathered again / And the sun grew round that very day." It's as if the speaker is witnessing the creation of the sky.

Of course, it's just another morning on the farm; the sun "gr[owing] round" reflects the way it takes its shape as it rises above the horizon. But when the speaker was a child, even regular mornings felt as special as the beginning of the world.

LINES 33-36

*So it must ...
... fields of praise.*

The last four lines of the stanza continue by even more explicitly comparing morning on the farm to the beginning of the world. "So it must have been after the birth of the simple light / In the first, spinning place," says the speaker. Or, as the Bible puts it, "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." This is first step in the creation of the world, according to the Bible.

Following that, God creates the Earth: "And God said, Let the water under the heavens be gathered unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so." This is "the first spinning

place" as the speaker puts it, the Earth set rotating for the first time. The Garden of Eden.

Next, the speaker pictures:

[...] the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

In these lines, the speaker blurs images from the farm with those of Eden. The horses and their stable are familiar from the previous stanza, where they were "Flashing into the dark" of night. Now, the speaker imagines these horses as the first horses in the world. These horses walk out of their "green stable" (note that word again, "green") and "On to the fields of praise." In the beginning all the creatures in the world praised God. The horses walk "spellbound"—that is, mesmerized—into fields that are full of such praise.

Note the strong [consonance](#) and [alliteration](#) throughout this section, especially in lines 33-35. Many hushed /s/ sounds ([sibilance](#)) combine with gentle /t/ and /l/ sounds to add a sense of quiet reverence to the lines, while the sharper /p/ and /b/ sounds contribute to the overall musicality of the speaker's reflection:

So it must have been after the birth of the simple
light
In the first, spinning place the spellbound horses
walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable

As with the previous stanza, the last two lines in this stanza get shorter, whittling down from nine syllables to six. This allows the stanza to end on a simple note, mirroring the "simple light" it describes. Whereas the previous stanzas describes running, riding, and flying, this one culminates in a feeling of stillness and peace—a feeling that is equally a part of the happiness of childhood as the more rambunctious moments.

LINES 37-41

*And honoured among ...
... house high hay*

In this next stanza the speaker is back up to old tricks, playing "among foxes" and running "through the high hay." The stanza contains phrases both repetitive and new. As seen throughout the poem, this [repetition](#) plays an important role in conveying the strength of the speaker's feelings and emphasizing the poem's most important elements.

The first five lines of this stanza convey many of the sentiments and scenes that the speaker has depicted in the previous stanzas. There is still "the gay [i.e., happy] house" and the speaker is still frolicking all over the farm, saying, "I ran my heedless ways." Now there are also pheasants (a type of bird

similar to chickens or turkeys).

The speaker also freshens up this continued description of happiness with a new [simile](#): "happy as the heart was long." What is a "long" heart? There's no saying exactly, but it echoes the "high hay" which has grown as tall as the house. At the very least, this phrase suggests that the young speaker has a big heart and that it's full of happiness. This phrase also echoes "All the sun long" from earlier in the poem, when the speaker was talking about playing throughout the whole day.

The speaker continues to address the [allusion](#) to the Garden of Eden and its [metaphorical](#) comparison to Fern Hill. In the previous stanza, the speaker described how "the sun grew round that very day," the day God created the world. In this stanza, the speaker references the "sun born over and over." This new phrase suggests that every day at Fern Hill was like the first day of the world.

Line 41 uses the rhythm of stresses within its nine syllables to capture the speaker's sense of joy:

My wishes raced through the house high hay

These last three stressed syllables capture a feeling of elation, which is matched by the [hyperbolic](#) image of "house high hay." Although the hay is tall, it's probably not actually as tall as the house. However, the speaker's memory exaggerates the grass's height, and the piled-on stresses contribute to that exaggeration.

The strong [alliteration](#) here adds to that feeling of exaggerated joy. Take, for example the /f/ sound of "foxes" and "pheasants," and the breathless /h/ of "happy," "heart," "heedless," and "house high hay."

LINES 42-45

*And nothing I ...
... out of grace,*

In the second half of the fifth stanza, the speaker again turns to [personified](#) time. These lines present the most direct response to the passage of time thus far in the poem. The speaker begins:

And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time
allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning
songs

The word "trades" usually refers to skilled work, such as being a carpenter or mechanic. Here, "sky blue trades" suggests that imaginative tasks that children often get up to, perhaps imagining they have work that needs to be done up in the sky. Busy with such "trades," the speaker didn't worry about how time would pass so quickly.

The phrase "tuneful turning" suggests that the turning of the

planet, all those cycles of night and day, is the music or "tune[]" of time. Amid all that music, however, time only allows a "few [...] morning songs." These "morning songs" are a [metaphor](#) for childhood, which, if a whole life is compared to a day, is like the morning.

After only a brief childhood, "the children green and golden / Follow [time] out of grace." In Christianity, "grace" is an important concept. Roughly, it suggests closeness to God, an awareness of God's love, and harmony with the divine nature of the world. Adam and Eve were in a state of grace before they were tempted by Satan and kicked out of Eden. In the context of this poem, it suggests the harmony with the world that the speaker felt as a child, the feeling that everything was "blessed." It's all the joy and goodness the speaker has been expressing this whole time, as seen through a religious lens.

Like Adam and Eve, though, and like all children, the speaker loses this grace. The speaker has to "Follow" time out of childhood. Children give up their "green and golden" state, their innocence and joy.

LINES 46-51

*Nothing I cared, ...
... the childless land.*

The final stanza marks a really strong shift in tone. The speaker goes from the ecstatic joy of the previous stanzas to a devastating lament for the end of childhood and innocence.

These lines describe childhood's end in [metaphorical](#) language. Lambs, and their white wool, [symbolize](#) innocence in Christianity. Meanwhile, the speaker's trip to the "swallow thron'g loft" (i.e., an attic full of birds), suggests some kind of initiation that leads the speaker into the world of adulthood.

Being led up to an attic by the hand has the hint of a first sexual experience, or perhaps of being led into a meeting of some sort of secret society. The language here doesn't have a definite interpretation; rather, its suggestiveness allows all sorts of different events to be conjured in the reader's mind.

The rich metaphorical language allows this [imagery](#) to apply to many peoples' lives. The swallows could symbolize any number of experiences that begin to alter a child's innocence. Similarly, being led not by the hand, but by "the shadow [the] hand," adds another level of figurative language. This darkly magical line suggests that the reader shouldn't take this moment literally, but imaginatively.

As part of the speaker's loss of childhood, the speaker describes how "I should hear [time] fly with the high fields / And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land." Before, the owls carried the farm away at night and it returned at dawn. Now, however, it doesn't return. The farm has "forever fled." Furthermore, all the children are gone as well. The speaker wakes up one morning and all the joy has been sucked out of the world.

Of course, growing up doesn't usually work like this, where someone wakes up one morning and suddenly they're no longer a child. Again, the speaker is being metaphorical to heighten reality. Looking back on one's life, it can feel like childhood suddenly ended, especially if adult life seems especially miserable. That's how the speaker feels. For this speaker, there's a huge difference between being a kid and being an adult. For adults, all the magic of childhood is gone.

LINES 52-54

*Oh as I ...
... like the sea.*

In the final three lines of the poem, the speaker offers a succinct lamentation for the end of childhood. The first line of this lament pieces together two phrases that have previously appeared, the first from line 1 ("Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs") and the second from lines 13-14 ("Time let me play and be / Golden in the mercy of his means"). Combining these two phrases, the speaker summarizes the main gist of the poem: childhood was great but short.

The final two lines of the poem then depict how the speaker feels at the end of childhood, and perhaps how the speaker still feels to this day. The speaker is still "green," that is, inexperienced, but now is also "dying." The speaker now has to confront mortality, the reality of an eventual death. Similarly, when Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan, they gained knowledge of death. Spiritually, then, the speaker is describing a fundamental element of the Christian experience—confronting the loss of innocence and the reality of death.

As noted above, the speaker is still "green," suggesting that people don't necessarily become wiser even though they now see themselves as mortal adults. Alternatively, this line can be read as saying that children have to confront adulthood and death before they're ready—before they've really grown up.

Finally, the speaker ends on the line, "Though I sang in my chains like the sea." These [metaphorical](#) "chains" can be interpreted as adulthood, which the speaker experiences as a form of imprisonment. Although the speaker doesn't go into exactly why adulthood feels this way, it's possible to make some inferences. If childhood was a time of being "easy" and "heedless," a time of feeling like a "prince," of being at one with the natural world, adulthood must be the opposite of these. This would mean it's a period of difficulty, self-consciousness, humiliation, and isolation from the surrounding world. So, yep, sounds pretty awful! This, at least, is how it seems the speaker feels about adulthood, or how the speaker felt growing up.

Despite being locked in the chains of the adult, the speaker still "sang [...] like the sea." This conjures a poetic [image](#) of the sea in chains, singing by thrashing its waves. Metaphorically interpreted, this image suggests that even though time forced the speaker to grow up, the speaker's free and "lilting" spirit never fully let go of childhood. In fact, the poem "Fern Hill" is

evidence of this. It is a poem written by an adult that celebrates childhood in incredibly beautiful and lavish language. The adult speaker, in effect, sings from the "chains" of adulthood.



SYMBOLS



FERN HILL

"Fern Hill" takes its title from an aunt's farm that Dylan Thomas often visited as a child. In the poem, it represents the wonderful farm that speaker recalls, a [symbol](#) of childhood's joy and innocence, which has now been lost.

Fern Hill isn't named anywhere in the poem except the title. However, every line in the poem unpacks the farm's symbolic resonance, whether capturing the speaker's childhood joy, or hinting at how the passage of time would eventually cause that joy to be lost. Sinking back into vivid memories, the speaker conjures the many wonderful elements of the farm: its plants and animals, how it felt at night and at dawn. Then, at the end of the poem, the speaker depicts how "the farm forever fled from the childless land." In other words—as a symbol of childhood's joy and innocence—the farm leaves the speaker when the speaker grows up. After the speaker becomes an adult, Fern Hill exists only in memory.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "under the apple boughs / About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,"
- **Line 3:** "The night above the dingle starry,"
- **Lines 6-7:** "And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns / And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves"
- **Line 8:** "Trail with daisies and barley"
- **Line 9:** "Down the rivers of the windfall light."
- **Lines 10-11:** "famous among the barns / About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,"
- **Lines 15-16:** "And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves / Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,"
- **Lines 19-20:** "All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay / Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air"
- **Line 21:** "And playing, lovely and watery"
- **Lines 24-27:** "As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away, / All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars / Flying with the ricks, and the horses / Flashing into the dark."
- **Lines 28-30:** "And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white / With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all / Shining, it was Adam and maiden,"
- **Lines 37-38:** "And honoured among foxes and pheasants

by the gay house / Under the new made clouds and
happy as the heart was long,”

- **Line 41:** “My wishes raced through the house high hay”
- **Line 51:** “And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.”



GREEN AND GOLDEN

Color plays an important role in “Fern Hill,” and no two colors are as important to the poem as green and gold. Green [symbolizes](#) youthful inexperience and naiveté, while gold symbolizes the joy and magic—even the “prince[liness]”—of childhood.

Green is often used as an [idiom](#) to mean inexperienced, comparing a youngster to a green sapling or sprout. In the poem, “green” captures how inexperienced children really *are* like sprouts. They are just as much a part of the natural world as delicate plants. For instance, as a child the speaker was “happy as the grass was green,” comparing a child’s happiness to the green of grass. At the end of the poem, the speaker says, “Time held me green and dying,” which suggests that people begin to sense their own mortality while they’re still kids—that, as the speaker implies throughout the poem, being a child is over much too soon.

“Golden,” meanwhile, captures the majesty of childhood. It first appears in the first stanza:

Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the
apple towns

The phrase “prince of the apple towns” gives a sense of how the speaker means for “golden” to be taken. It captures the specialness the speaker felt being out in the world as a young child, of feeling like royalty amid humble things. More broadly, golden suggests the joy and magic of childhood.

Paired together, “green and golden” craft a picture of how naiveté and youthful imagination weave together to create childhood’s best memories.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “happy as the grass was green”
- **Line 5:** “Golden in the heydays of his eyes”
- **Line 10:** “And as I was green and carefree”
- **Lines 14-15:** “Golden in the mercy of his means, / And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman”
- **Line 22:** “And fire green as grass”
- **Line 35:** “Out of the whinnying green stable”
- **Line 44:** “Before the children green and golden”

- **Line 53:** “Time held me green and dying”



WHITE

While “green and golden” [symbolize](#) the naiveté and magic of childhood, white symbolizes its innocence. White is first referenced at the beginning of the fourth stanza:

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer
white
With the dew, come back [...]

Light reveals the farm at dawn, so that it reappears like a traveler who is covered in so much dew that he gleams white. In western literature, the color white often represents innocence, and here it captures the role the farm played in the young speaker’s innocent perception of the world.

At the beginning of the last stanza, the speaker uses white in a more overtly symbolic manner:

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time
would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my
hand,

In Christianity, lambs symbolize innocence—often the innocence of Jesus, which is ultimately sacrificed. The speaker’s innocence is like that too. It is eventually sacrificed to make way for adulthood. Here, the speaker loses that innocence by going up to the dark, shadowy, “swallow thronged” attic.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 28-29:** “like a wanderer white / With the dew”
- **Line 46:** “the lamb white days”



POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) is an extremely important part of “Fern Hill.” Not only does it add to the poem’s musicality, but it creates an almost chant-like sound, leaving the reader “spellbound” by the poem’s extravagant music.

The second stanza contains some of the poem’s most intense alliteration:

Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and
herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear

and cold,
And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

In these lines, the speaker first expresses the joy of feeling like all the animals respond to the speaker. The phrase, "And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman," with its echoing /h/ and /g/ sounds, captures the speaker's excitement. Then, the speaker describes how the landscape itself feels holy. The lines shorten and the alliteration begins to slow down, mimicking how "the sabbath rang slowly / In the pebbles of the holy stream." The delay of the last /s/ sound suggests time slowing down to a standstill, a sense of peace at the end of the stanza.

A similar effect occurs in the fourth stanza:

So it must have been after the birth of the simple
light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses
walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable

Here, the speaker imagines the beginning of the world, according to how the Bible tells it. This is a truly rapturous event, where light, the earth, and animals are all created. After being created, the horses are "spellbound," mesmerized by what has happened, and the alliteration captures this amazement. The hushed [sibilance](#) of those /s/ sounds works with the quiet /w/ sounds to create a feeling of wonder and reverence, while the stronger /b/ and /p/ sounds add yet more interest and excitement to the lines.

At the end of the poem, the rapture of alliteration has turned into a much sadder sound. For instance, in the last stanza, the phrase "the farm forever fled from the childless land" conveys the sudden sadness at realizing that childhood is over forever. The repeated /f/ sounds suggest that the speaker speaks this line emphatically and sorrowfully, spitting out these words in sadness and frustration.

The final lines, "Though I sang in my chains like the sea," have an even more sorrowful, wistful air to them. Separated by a bit more space than other occurrences of alliteration (such as the previous example), these /s/ sounds again convey a sort of slowing down. This time, however, they don't convey any sort of peace, but rather an experience of intense melancholy, even suffering.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "house," "happy," "grass," "green"
- **Line 4:** "hail"
- **Line 5:** "heydays"
- **Line 7:** "time," "lordly," "trees," "leaves"
- **Line 8:** "Trail," "daisies"

- **Line 9:** "Down"
- **Line 14:** "mercy," "means"
- **Line 15:** "green," "golden," "huntsman," "herdsman"
- **Line 16:** "clear," "cold"
- **Line 17:** "sabbath," "slowly"
- **Line 18:** "streams"
- **Line 19:** "long," "lovely," "hay"
- **Line 20:** "high," "house"
- **Line 22:** "green," "grass"
- **Line 23:** "simple," "stars"
- **Line 24:** "sleep"
- **Line 26:** "Flying"
- **Line 27:** "Flashing"
- **Line 28:** "wanderer," "white"
- **Line 29:** "With," "come," "cock," "shoulder"
- **Line 30:** "Shining"
- **Line 31:** "gathered"
- **Line 32:** "grew"
- **Line 33:** "So," "been," "birth," "simple"
- **Line 34:** "spinning," "spellbound," "walking," "warm"
- **Line 35:** "whinnying"
- **Line 37:** "foxes," "pheasants"
- **Line 38:** "happy," "heart"
- **Line 39:** "over," "over"
- **Line 40:** "heedless," "ways"
- **Line 41:** "wishes," "raced," "house," "high," "hay"
- **Line 42:** "trades," "time"
- **Line 43:** "tuneful," "turning," "so," "such," "songs"
- **Line 44:** "green," "golden"
- **Line 45:** "grace"
- **Line 46:** "time," "take"
- **Line 48:** "rising"
- **Line 49:** "riding"
- **Line 50:** "fly," "fields"
- **Line 51:** "farm," "forever," "fled," "from"
- **Line 52:** "mercy," "means"
- **Line 54:** "sang," "sea"

ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) contributes to the musicality of "Fern Hill." The first and last stanzas are some of the most assonance heavy. For instance, the poem begins:

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was
green,

Beginning with short /uh/ sounds, the speaker switches to /ow/ and then /ah/ sounds. This creates a tinkling, melodic feel, almost as if this were the beginning of a wistful folk song. The assonance continues throughout the stanza, the subsequent rhythm and melody reflecting the joy and exuberance of the

speaker's youth. Take lines 4-5, with their clear repetition of long /i/ and /ay/ sounds:

Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,

Similarly, the last two lines employ a great deal of assonance:

Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

The long /i/, /ee/, and /ay/ sounds again make the poem feel intensely musical here, evoking the speaker's song. This time, however, the melody is a lot sadder. The speaker mourns the loss of childhood. The melodic vowel sounds add resonance to the bittersweet nature of the speaker's memories. Bitter because childhood is over, but sweet because it was so "golden."

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "was young," "under," "boughs"
- **Line 2:** "About," "house," "happy as," "grass"
- **Line 4:** "Time," "hail," "climb"
- **Line 5:** "heydays," "eyes"
- **Line 6:** "among," "was"
- **Line 7:** "once," "time I," "trees," "leaves"
- **Line 8:** "Trail," "daisies"
- **Line 9:** "rivers," "windfall"
- **Line 10:** "green," "carefree," "barns"
- **Line 11:** "yard," "farm"
- **Line 12:** "sun," "young once"
- **Line 13:** "me," "be"
- **Line 14:** "mercy," "means"
- **Line 15:** "golden," "huntsman," "herdsman"
- **Line 16:** "foxes on," "cold"
- **Line 17:** "slowly"
- **Line 18:** "holy"
- **Line 19:** "sun," "was running," "was lovely"
- **Line 21:** "lovely," "watery"
- **Line 22:** "as grass"
- **Line 25:** "All," "long"
- **Lines 25-26:** "nightjars / Flying with"
- **Line 26:** "ricks"
- **Line 28:** "like," "white"
- **Line 29:** "cock on," "all"
- **Line 30:** "Adam"
- **Line 31:** "gathered"
- **Line 35:** "whinnying green stable"
- **Line 36:** "fields," "praise"
- **Line 37:** "honoured," "foxes," "gay"
- **Line 38:** "made," "happy as"
- **Line 40:** "ways"

- **Line 41:** "raced," "high," "hay"
- **Line 42:** "I," "my sky," "trades," "time"
- **Line 43:** "morning"
- **Line 44:** "Before," "children," "golden"
- **Line 46:** "I," "white days," "time," "take"
- **Line 47:** "swallow thronged loft"
- **Line 48:** "rising"
- **Line 49:** "riding"
- **Line 50:** "I," "fly," "high"
- **Line 51:** "forever fled"
- **Line 52:** "was young," "easy," "mercy," "means"
- **Line 53:** "Time," "me green," "dying"
- **Line 54:** "I sang," "my chains like," "sea"

CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) plays a pretty involved role throughout "Fern Hill." It contributes to the vivid, almost over-the-top quality of the poem's language.

Much of the time, consonance captures the speaker's sense of wonder at the magic of childhood. For instance, here are the last three lines of the first stanza:

And once below a time I lordly had the trees and
leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

Here, /l/, /t/, /r/, /d/, and /n/ sounds weave together lyrically, summoning the delicate holiness of the scene the speaker describes.

Take any line from this poem at random and a similarly diverse array of sounds will appear. For instance at the beginning of the third stanza, /l/, /n/, /h/, /m/, /r/, and /g/ sounds help craft a sense of childlike joy and wonder:

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the
chimneys, it was air
And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.

Just as the "hay," "chimneys," and "fire" all seem to drift through the landscape, forming one great world of play, the repeating consonants here create their own sonic landscape, a richly textured expanse of language.

At the end of the poem, consonance contributes to the speaker's mournful description of the end of childhood.

And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless
land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means

First, /f/, /r/, /l/, and /d/ sounds capture the shock of suddenly realizing that childhood is over, that the land is "childless" now. Then, the /z/ sound in the following line, along with /m/ [alliteration](#), transitions into the speaker's full-on lament for the end of childhood. The /z/ sound conveys an almost wheezing wistfulness, while the power of /m/ sound captures the strength of the speaker's sadness. All in all, then, consonance tracks the speaker's journey through childhood, following its highs and lows.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "as," "was," "easy"
- **Lines 1-2:** "apple boughs / About"
- **Line 2:** "house," "happy," "grass," "green"
- **Line 3:** "starry"
- **Line 4:** "Time let," "hail," "climb"
- **Line 5:** "Golden," "heydays," "his eyes"
- **Line 6:** "wagons," "prince," "apple"
- **Line 7:** "And once below," "time," "lordly," "trees," "leaves"
- **Line 8:** "Trail," "daisies and barley"
- **Line 9:** "Down," "windfall light"
- **Line 10:** "carefree, famous among," "barns"
- **Line 11:** "About," "happy," "singing," "farm," "home"
- **Line 12:** "sun," "once only"
- **Line 13:** "Time let"
- **Line 14:** "mercy," "means"
- **Line 15:** "And green and golden," "hunter and herdsman"
- **Line 16:** "horn," "hills barked clear," "cold"
- **Line 17:** "sabbath," "slowly"
- **Line 18:** "pebbles," "holy streams"
- **Line 19:** "All," "long," "lovely," "hay"
- **Line 20:** "high," "house," "tunes from," "chimneys"
- **Line 21:** "playing, lovely"
- **Line 22:** "fire green," "grass"
- **Line 23:** "nightly," "simple stars"
- **Line 24:** "sleep," "owls"
- **Line 25:** "All," "moon long," "blessed among stables"
- **Line 26:** "Flying," "ricks"
- **Line 27:** "Flashing," "dark"
- **Line 28:** "wanderer white"
- **Line 29:** "With," "dew," "come back," "cock"
- **Line 30:** "Adam," "maiden"
- **Line 31:** "sky gathered again"
- **Line 32:** "sun grew round"
- **Line 33:** "So," "must," "been," "birth," "simple light"
- **Line 34:** "first, spinning place," "spellbound horses walking warm"
- **Line 35:** "whinnying green stable"
- **Line 37:** "foxes," "pheasants"
- **Line 38:** "happy," "heart"
- **Line 40:** "heedless"
- **Line 41:** "wishes raced," "house high hay"

- **Line 42:** "cared," "sky," "trades," "time allows"
- **Line 43:** "all," "tuneful turning so," "such morning songs"
- **Line 44:** "children green and golden"
- **Line 45:** "grace"
- **Line 46:** "time," "take"
- **Line 47:** "swallow," "loft"
- **Line 48:** "rising"
- **Line 49:** "Nor," "riding"
- **Line 50:** "hear him fly," "high fields"
- **Line 51:** "farm forever fled from," "childless land"
- **Line 52:** "as," "was," "easy," "mercy," "means"
- **Line 53:** "Time held me green and dying"
- **Line 54:** "sang in my chains like," "sea"

ALLUSION

Throughout the poem, the speaker [alludes](#) to Christian stories and beliefs. The most prominent allusion is to the biblical story of Adam and Eve, who lived in the Garden of Eden. The speaker compares childhood to Adam and Eve's experience in Eden.

Adam and Eve were, according to the bible, the first humans. God created them free of sin, shame, and guilt. They lived in a paradise called the Garden of Eden, where they had everything they needed. They tended to this garden, but they never had to work hard. They were at one with everything around them.

For the speaker, childhood was just like that, it "was Adam and maiden." Every morning was like the creation of the world, according to the speaker. "So it must have been after the birth of the simple light / In the first, spinning place," says the speaker, imagining that each dawn is like God's creation of light, and that the landscape of Fern Hill is like "the first, spinning place"—that is, like the earth when it was first created.

On the farm, the speaker says, "once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves / Trail with daisies and barley." In Christianity "Lord" often refers to God, who—according to the story—would walk with Adam and Eve through the Eden. By using such language, the speaker suggests that being out in the farm was a holy experience, that all the plants seemed to flower and bloom just as they did for God at the beginning of the world. Similarly, the speaker describes how "the sabbath rang slowly / In the pebbles of the holy streams." The sabbath is the holy day in Christianity and Judaism, the day that God rested after creating the world. Seeming to hear the sabbath even in the rocks at the bottoms of rivers, the speaker suggests that the entire world is holy to a child, that even humble stones can become beautifully ringing church bells.

Unfortunately for humanity, Adam and Eve didn't get to stay in the Garden of Eden. They were tempted by the Devil to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge of good and evil, and then expelled from the garden. This marked their fall from grace—their state of being close to God. In losing grace, they lost their innocence and harmony with the world. Instead, they

came to know suffering, self-consciousness, isolation, and shame.

For the speaker, growing up is a similar experience. Describing how children "Follow [time] out of the grace," the speaker suggests that childhood is also a loss of grace. When people grow up, they lose the feeling that the humble, natural world around them is a paradise. Instead, like Adam and Eve, they are left to make their way through a world that is a lot colder and more difficult than it was as a child.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves"
- **Line 8:** "Trail with daisies and barley"
- **Line 17:** "And the sabbath rang slowly"
- **Line 18:** "In the pebbles of the holy streams."
- **Line 30:** "it was Adam and maiden,"
- **Line 31:** "The sky gathered again"
- **Line 32:** "And the sun grew round that very day."
- **Lines 33-34:** "So it must have been after the birth of the simple light / In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm"
- **Line 35:** "Out of the whinnying green stable"
- **Line 36:** "On to the fields of praise."
- **Line 45:** "Follow him out of grace,"
- **Line 46:** "the lamb white days"

METAPHOR

[Metaphorical](#) language plays a huge role in "Fern Hill." It allows the speaker to transform personal memories into much more general and extravagant [imagery](#).

One of the speaker's strategies for transforming memories into metaphorical images is to blur the senses together, comparing something usually experienced by one sense (e.g., sight) to something experienced by a different sense (e.g., hearing). For instance, in the third stanza, the speaker references "tunes from the chimneys." Here, the speaker compares the smoke from a chimney to "tunes"—that is, music. This magical image transforms an ordinary sight into something wonderful and joyful. It captures how children find magic and happiness in ordinary things.

Similarly, the speaker uses a sort of blurring effect to describe falling asleep, comparing it to "riding to sleep." In the third stanza, this blends with the speaker's description of owls taking flight at night. Because the farm disappears under the cover of darkness at night, it almost seems as if the owls carry the farm away with them: "As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away." Taken all together, it seems like the speaker falls to sleep by riding the owls as they fly away at night.

Sometimes, the speaker pairs metaphorical language and the [personification](#) of time. For instance, the speaker says, "Time let

me hail and climb / Golden in the heydays of his eyes." Here, time is personified as a giant, godlike figure whose eyes the speaker can climb in. Furthermore, the speaker compares these eyes to "heydays"—that is, the best days the speaker ever had. The speaker also metaphorically compares being a kid to being "Golden," which suggests a feeling of joy and specialness. Taken all together, these highly metaphorical lines capture how childhood is only a temporary phase in people's lives. It's because of time that the speaker can experience childhood, but it's also because of time that childhood ends.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "the lilted house"
- **Line 4:** "Time let me hail and climb"
- **Line 5:** "Golden in the heydays of his eyes,"
- **Lines 6-7:** "honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns / And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves"
- **Lines 10-12:** "I was green and carefree, famous among the barns / About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home, / In the sun that is young once only,"
- **Line 13:** "Time let me play and be"
- **Line 14:** "Golden in the mercy of his means,"
- **Line 15:** "And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman,"
- **Line 20:** "the tunes from the chimneys"
- **Line 21:** "lovely and watery"
- **Line 24:** "As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,"
- **Line 30:** "it was Adam and maiden,"
- **Line 34:** "the first, spinning place"
- **Line 35:** "whinnying green stable"
- **Line 36:** "fields of praise"
- **Lines 37-38:** "And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house / Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,"
- **Line 39:** "In the sun born over and over,"
- **Line 41:** "My wishes raced through the house high hay"
- **Lines 42-43:** "And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows / In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs"
- **Line 44:** "the children green and golden"
- **Line 45:** "Follow him out of grace,"
- **Lines 46-47:** "Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me / Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,"
- **Line 49:** "riding to sleep"
- **Line 50:** "I should hear him fly with the high fields"
- **Lines 51-52:** "And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land. / Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,"
- **Line 53:** "Time held me green and dying"
- **Line 54:** "Though I sang in my chains like the sea."

SIMILE

In "Fern Hill," [simile](#) dovetails with the poem's extravagant use of [metaphor](#). While metaphor appears frequently, almost constantly, throughout the poem, simile is more sparing. However, it blends right in with the poem's use of metaphor, accomplishing many of the same things.

Interestingly, three out of the poem's five similes follow a similar structure: "happy as the grass was green" in stanza 1, "fire green as grass" in stanza 3, and "happy as the heart was long" in stanza 5. These three interlinking similes convey a sense of childhood's vivid joy. First, the speaker compares the intensity of childhood happiness to the intensity of the grass's green. Note how, as with the poem's metaphor section, this comparison blurs different senses, so that the sense of sight ("green") is compared to an emotion ("happy").

This happens even more obviously in the next connected simile, "fire green as grass." Going totally surreal—evoking an [image](#) that goes against reality in order to get at a deeper truth—the speaker says that the fire is green, just like grass. This might be referring to the fire in a stove or a bonfire. Or it might even be implying that the grass is like a green flame. Though there's no one correct way to interpret this image, it is undeniably poetic, evoking the intense beauty and magic that children are capable of perceiving in the natural world.

Next, "happy as the heart was long" echos another simile from stanza three, "the hay / Fields high as the house." The speaker [hyperbolically](#) says that the hay (grass grown to feed livestock) has gotten as tall as the house, capturing how children tend to view the world in exaggerated proportions. Then, "happy as the heart was long" picks up on this comparison. Now, the speaker's heart has grown long, just like the hay. The height of the heart corresponds to the speaker's happiness, as if the longer the heart/hay, the happier the person.

The speaker also compares the farm to a "wanderer," a traveler who reappears with the morning light. This is also an instance of [personification](#), so it is discussed in more detail in that section of the guide.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "happy as the grass was green,"
- **Lines 19-20:** "the hay / Fields high as the house"
- **Line 22:** "fire green as grass"
- **Lines 28-29:** "the farm, like a wanderer white / With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder"
- **Line 38:** "happy as the heart was long"

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker's uses [personification](#) in "Fern Hill" to compare time to a godlike figure. Throughout the poem, the speaker invokes time as an all powerful force that both grants people

childhoods and takes them away.

At the beginning of the poem, the speaker says, "Time let me hail and climb / Golden in the heydays of his eyes." Here, time seems like a giant figure whose eyes are "heydays," that is, the speaker's best days. And in the next stanza, the speaker says, "Time let me play and be / Golden in the mercy of his means." Both these examples depict time as an all-powerful figure who "let[s]" the speaker have a childhood. It is out of time's "mercy" and "means"—that is, time's compassion and resources—that the speaker gets to be a kid at all.

At the end of the poem, it becomes clear that the childhood time allots to people isn't nearly long enough. The speaker says, "time allows / In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs." Here, the speaker imagines personified time as making music; this music is the days of people's lives. Yet despite all this music, all the time in the eternity of the universe, people only get to be children for a small amount of time. People are allowed only a few "morning songs." If a whole life were compared to a day, then childhood would be its "morning." Just a few morning songs, and then it's on to the dreary music of adulthood.

In these ending lines, time isn't so merciful. The speaker describes how "time would take me / Up to the swallow thronged loft the shadow of my hand." This mysterious image suggests a kind of rite or ritual, or perhaps even some event of a sexual nature. Not that the speaker is necessarily literally talking about sex. Rather, this moment captures the feeling of being initiated into a new adulthood world—whatever that world may be—from which there is no going back to the innocence of childhood.

As a result, time "fl[ies] with the high fields," taking all the magic of the farm with him, so that the speaker "wake[s] to the farm forever fled from the childless land." It's as if time has suddenly sucked all the joy out of the world. Additionally, the speaker had previously personified the farm itself in the fourth stanza, comparing it to "a wanderer white / With the dew, come back." At dawn, the farm reappears in the early light like a traveller who has just arrived. Covered in the dew drops, the farm gleams as white as "the lamb white days," that the speaker invokes in the final stanza. This whiteness [symbolizes](#) innocence, and the dew-white farm represents all the innocence of the speaker's childhood. When time, then, flees with the farm, it also takes away the speaker's innocence.

In the final lines, the speaker says, "Time held me green and dying / Though I sang in my chains like the sea." Here, the speaker is simultaneously young and old, "green and dying." Time holds the speaker in this state of both life and death. Is time comforting the speaker, holding the speaker like a dying comrade or a sick child? Or is it imprisoning the speaker as if with chains? It's impossible to say. As throughout the poem, time is both merciful and cruel, the source of joy and comfort as well as the cause of suffering and death.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "Time let me hail and climb"
- **Line 5:** "Golden in the heydays of his eyes,"
- **Line 13:** "Time let me play and be"
- **Line 14:** "Golden in the mercy of his means,"
- **Lines 42-43:** "time allows / In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs"
- **Line 45:** "Follow him out of grace,"
- **Lines 46-47:** "time would take me / Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,"
- **Line 50:** "I should hear him fly with the high fields"
- **Lines 51-52:** "And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land. / Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,"
- **Line 53:** "Time held me green and dying"
- **Line 54:** "Though I sang in my chains like the sea."

ANAPHORA

The speaker begins lines with "And" throughout the poem, a use of [anaphora](#) that captures how there are always more good things to say about childhood. Some of these moments are too spaced out to perhaps be *true* anaphora, but this repetition still helps convey the endlessness of childhood joys. For instance, in the first stanza the speaker says:

And honoured among wagons I was prince of the
apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and
leaves

Here, the repeated "And" creates a feeling of childhood memories piling up on each other. The reader quickly gets the sense that there's a lot more where these came from: the speaker is full of such memories. The repeated "And" also captures how children speak, hopping from thought to thought without stopping. *And this, and this, oh and this!* The third stanza intensifies this effect:

And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.
And nightly under the simple stars

These shortened lines add to the breathless feel of a child listing off all the best parts of the day. In remembering what life was like as a child, the speaker drifts into a childlike reverie, quickly listing the "playing," the "fire," and the "stars" that are essential elements in a kid's day.

At the end of the poem, anaphora starts to fade, perhaps indicating the speaker's weariness in the face of time's passage. While most stanzas have two or three instances of this specific anaphora, the last only has one: "And wake to the farm forever

fled from the childless land." This use of "And" does an about-face. Rather than listing all the great things about childhood, the speaker laments how the farm seems to have disappeared: childhood is gone forever. As with so many poetic devices in the poem, anaphora starts out by celebrating childhood but ends up lamenting its end.

There are other small moments of anaphora in the poem as well, many of which are also part of the poem's reliance on [parallelism](#) and general [repetition](#) to create an almost overwhelming sense of childhood abundance. Take, for example, the anaphora of lines 19-20:

[...] it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the
chimneys, it was air

And 29-30:

[...] it was all
Shining, it was Adam and maiden,

The frequent repetition of "it was" reflects that the speaker's childhood "was" many, many things.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "And honoured"
- **Line 7:** "And once below"
- **Line 10:** "And as I was green"
- **Line 15:** "And green and golden"
- **Line 19:** "it was running, it was lovely"
- **Line 20:** "it was air"
- **Line 21:** "And playing"
- **Line 22:** "And fire"
- **Line 23:** " And nightly"
- **Line 28:** "And then to awake"
- **Line 29:** "it was all"
- **Line 30:** "it was Adam"
- **Line 32:** "And the sun grew"
- **Line 37:** "And honoured among"
- **Line 42:** "And nothing I cared"
- **Line 46:** "Nothing I cared"
- **Line 51:** "And wake"

IMAGERY

The poem employs a great deal of [metaphorical](#), even surreal, [imagery](#). The "metaphor" section of this guide focuses on the [figurative](#) role of the poem's images and how they blend different senses together. For this section, we'll focus on how imagery helps conjure the environment of Fern Hill itself.

"Fern Hill" doesn't take place at Fern Hill so much as it takes place in the speaker's *memories* of Fern Hill. As such, it relies on impressions of things in the natural environment that stood out

the most to the speaker. For instance, the green of the grass and hay is clearly very important to the speaker. Throughout the poem, the speaker mentions the color "green" as well as "grass" and "hay" many times, evoking the freshness of the rural environment. "[T]rees," "leaves," "daisies," "barley," "ricks," and "apple boughs" are all part of this general orbit as well, part of the speaker's attempt to convey how important plant life is to a young child.

Animals, of course, are also essential to farm life—whether they're horses, nocturnal nightjars and owls, calves, foxes, or lambs. These animals don't just surround the farm, either; they interact with the speaker, as when "the calves / Sang to my horn" or "owls were bearing the farm away." These animals all make a strong impression on the speaker, and so they all stand out as images in the speaker's swirling memories.

Day and night are very important too. The poem constantly invokes night and dawn, emphasizing how dramatic these times of day are to child. Each sunrise seems as if "the sun grew round" for the first time. At night, the speaker imagines horses mysteriously "Flashing into the dark" as the farm disappears, carried away by the owls. Over the forested valley, the night is "starry." The emphasis is always on the mystery, magic, and newness of life on the farm. The sun is "young" and the cycle of night and day isn't exhausting, but always full of wonderful images.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "young and easy under the apple boughs / About the lilted house and happy as the grass was green,"
- **Line 3:** "The night above the dingle starry,"
- **Line 7:** "And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves"
- **Line 8:** "Trail with daisies and barley"
- **Line 9:** "Down the rivers of the windfall light."
- **Lines 10-11:** "And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns / About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,"
- **Lines 15-16:** "And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves / Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,"
- **Line 17:** "And the sabbath rang slowly"
- **Line 18:** "In the pebbles of the holy streams."
- **Lines 19-20:** "the hay / Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys,"
- **Line 22:** "And fire green as grass."
- **Line 25:** "All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars"
- **Line 26:** " Flying with the ricks, and the horses"
- **Line 27:** "Flashing into the dark."
- **Lines 28-29:** "a wanderer white / With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder"

- **Line 31:** "The sky gathered again"
- **Line 32:** "And the sun grew round that very day"
- **Line 34:** "the spellbound horses walking warm"
- **Line 35:** "Out of the whinnying green stable"
- **Lines 37-38:** "the gay house / Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,"
- **Line 39:** "In the sun born over and over,"
- **Line 41:** " the house high hay"

REPETITION

"Fern Hill" uses [repetition](#) so intensely throughout that the poem becomes a kind of echo chamber or tangled loop of sounds. Despite childhood being cut off by time, the speaker's memories themselves seem somewhat endless and circular—perhaps even inescapable.

Much of the poem's repetition simply consists of repeated words that reflect the poem's thematic ideas. Sometimes these repeated words appear close enough together to count as a specific device like [diacope](#) (as in "it was lovely, the hay [...] lovely and watery"), but this isn't always the case. Note how the speaker returns again and again throughout the poem to the words "house," "time," "green," "young," "happy," "sun," "moon," "hay," "field," "farm," "horses," and "sky." From this repetition alone, it's easy enough to see that the poem has something to do with joy, youth, and the natural world. That the speaker keeps returning to the same words suggests how strong and vivid his memories are.

Some of this repetition might also be very loosely thought of as [refrain](#). Refrain is language that is repeated throughout a poem, often like the chorus of a song. As can be seen from the highlighted phrases in the poem, the repeated phrases in "Fern Hill" are not nearly as neatly structured as the verse-chorus-verse structure of a song. However, one of hallmarks of this poem—and much of Thomas's writing—is how it takes inspiration from traditional forms while dissolving those forms in much more wild and modern language. Just as this poem has a very clear and powerful sense of rhythm, but no [meter](#), it also has a very lyrical sense of refrain without obeying the clear-cut structure of traditional songs.

The most obvious refrains or repeated words in the poem are "green," "golden," and sometimes "green and golden." The color "green" [idiomatically](#) refers to the inexperience and innocence children, while also capturing their connection to nature. "Golden," meanwhile, captures the magic and majesty of childhood. Together, these words capture all the important elements of being a kid, so it makes sense that they're repeated throughout the poem. Notice also how this refrain is modified twice. First, in the second stanzas as "green and carefree" and in the last as "green and dying." Between these two phrase, the entire arc of the poem can be seen, from happiness to misery.

Other instances that could be considered refrain are just

repeated a couple of times. For instance, the phrase "as I was young and easy" appears at the beginning and end of the poem. Although this phrase remains literally unchanged, its resonance gets completely altered by the end. While the beginning of the poem captures the easygoing joy of childhood, the end conveys the sadness at realizing how short-lived such joy would be, and how naive it was.

Two other types of repetition, [anaphora](#) and [parallelism](#), are discussed separately in this guide.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "as I was young and easy," "apple"
- **Line 2:** "house," "happy," "the grass was green"
- **Line 3:** "starry"
- **Line 4:** "Time let me"
- **Line 5:** "Golden"
- **Line 6:** "apple"
- **Line 10:** "green and carefree"
- **Line 11:** "happy," "the farm"
- **Line 12:** "the sun"
- **Line 13:** "Time let me"
- **Line 14:** "Golden," "the mercy of his means"
- **Line 15:** "green and golden"
- **Line 19:** "the sun," "lovely"
- **Lines 19-20:** "hay / Fields"
- **Line 20:** "house"
- **Line 21:** "lovely"
- **Line 22:** "fire green as grass"
- **Line 23:** "nightly," "stars"
- **Line 24:** "rode to sleep," "farm"
- **Line 25:** "the moon," "stables"
- **Line 26:** "horses"
- **Line 28:** "the farm"
- **Line 31:** "The sky"
- **Line 32:** "the sun"
- **Line 34:** "horses"
- **Line 35:** "green," "stable"
- **Line 36:** "fields"
- **Line 38:** "happy"
- **Line 39:** "the sun"
- **Line 41:** "the house high hay"
- **Line 42:** "sky"
- **Line 44:** "green and golden"
- **Line 48:** "the moon"
- **Line 49:** "riding to sleep"
- **Line 50:** "the high fields"
- **Line 52:** "as I was young and easy," "the mercy of his means"
- **Line 53:** "green and dying"

ENJAMBMENT

"Fern Hill" uses a good deal of [enjambment](#), adding to the

poem's energetic recollections of childhood. Enjambment creates a sense of anticipation and momentum, pushing the reader forward through the poem and in doing so evoking the speaker's childish excitement. Take, for example, lines 1-2 and 7-9:

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
 About the lilted house and happy as the grass was
 green,
 [...]
 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and
 leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.

This swirl of enjambed lines allows the speaker to convey the impression of a deep whirl of memories. Once the speaker starts reminiscing about childhood, it all comes flooding back. And as the poem cascades down the page, it creates a feeling of having an excess of information—which is, in part, the point: childhood was a wonderful excess of joyful things, the poem says.

In addition to capturing the speaker's rush of memories, enjambment also mimics the energy of childhood. It conveys the feeling of running through the magical environment of a farm:

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the
 chimneys, it was air
 And playing [...]

Here, the really dramatic enjambment of "hay / Fields" turns sharply at the edge of the line, just the speaker darts around the farm. Meanwhile, the word "air" seems to linger momentarily at the end of its line, almost as if the speaker has leaped into the air, before being brought back to earth by "And playing." Together, these two lines convey the speaker's excitement at being outdoors.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "boughs / About"
- **Lines 4-5:** "climb / Golden"
- **Lines 7-8:** "leaves / Trail"
- **Lines 8-9:** "barley / Down"
- **Lines 10-11:** "barns / About"
- **Lines 13-14:** "be / Golden"
- **Lines 15-16:** "calves / Sang"
- **Lines 17-18:** "slowly / In"
- **Lines 19-20:** "hay / Fields"
- **Lines 20-21:** "air / And"
- **Lines 23-24:** "stars / As"

- **Lines 25-26:** "nightjars / Flying"
- **Lines 26-27:** "horses / Flashing"
- **Lines 28-29:** "white / With"
- **Lines 29-30:** "all / Shining"
- **Lines 33-34:** "light / In"
- **Lines 34-35:** "warm / Out"
- **Lines 35-36:** "stable / On"
- **Lines 37-38:** "house / Under"
- **Lines 42-43:** "allows / In"
- **Lines 43-44:** "songs / Before"
- **Lines 44-45:** "golden / Follow"
- **Lines 46-47:** "me / Up"
- **Lines 49-50:** "sleep / I"

ASYNDETON

The poem is filled with dizzying [asyndeton](#), the lack of conjunctions between clauses creating a piling up effect as the speaker's childhood memories swirl around the page. For example, take lines 15-16:

And green and golden I was huntsman and
herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear
and cold,

And lines 19-21:

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the
chimneys, it was air
And playing, lovely and watery

In both sections, the asyndeton adds to the momentum and excitement of the poem. The poem surges forward, not caring to stop for pesky conjunctions, instead thrusting the reader into the rush of the speaker's memories.

Much of the poem's asyndeton is connected to a related poetic device known as hypotaxis, a type of sentence structure where a lot of grammatically connected phrases pile on top on each other, resulting in a long and intricate sentence. In "Fern Hill," the mixture of asyndeton and hypotaxis convey the way the speaker's memories swirl into one another, creating a sweeping landscape of childhood joy.

In addition to capturing the joy of childhood, these devices also captures how that joy depends on *time*. For instance, here is the start of stanza 2, which features both asyndeton (in bold) and hypotaxis:

And as I was green and **carefree, famous** among the
barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was

home,
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,

This sentence could be compressed to, "And as I was green and carefree [...] Time let me play and be." The rest of the phrases in these lines add evocative details (each latched on without a conjunction, creating asyndeton) but aren't necessary. This compressed sentence captures the basic gist of the entire poem: that the speaker had a great childhood because time temporarily allowed it. Yet the basic meaning of this sentence is delayed until the fourth and fifth lines.

This delay mimics the way childhood itself is a kind of delay, a period of fun and diversions between birth and adulthood. The speaker gets to be "famous among the barns" and "singing as the farm was home" before time intervenes, making it clear that the speaker only gets to do those things in "the mercy of [time's] means"—only with the permission of time itself.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "About the lilted house and happy as the grass was green, / The night above the dingle starry,"
- **Lines 10-12:** "And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns / About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home, / In the sun that is young once only,"
- **Lines 15-16:** "And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves / Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,"
- **Lines 19-21:** "All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay / Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air / And playing, lovely and watery"
- **Lines 28-31:** "like a wanderer white / With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all / Shining, it was Adam and maiden, / The sky gathered again"
- **Line 34:** "In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm"
- **Lines 40-41:** " I ran my heedless ways, / My wishes raced through the house high hay"

PARALLELISM

As noted throughout this guide, "Fern Hill" is an intensely repetitive poem. In particular, it uses [parallelism](#) throughout, returning again and again to specific sentence structures and phrasings to create its tangled, dizzying swirls of memory.

One simple example of parallelism comes in stanzas 1, 2, and 5 where "honoured among the wagons" becomes "famous among the barns" and finally "honoured among foxes and pheasants." Repeating this structure helps bring out underlying emotions

and memories, the way that kids feel special amid the humble things of the world. As "barn," "wagons," and "foxes and pheasants" emphasize, kids don't need an expensive lifestyle; being on a simple farm is enough to make them feel like royalty.

In fact, note how similar much of the phrasing is stanzas 1 and 2 overall:

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
[...] I was prince of the apple towns

Versus:

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
[...] I was huntsman and herdsman [...]

Much of the word changes here are simply synonyms; "young and easy" essentially means the same thing as "green and carefree," while "lilting house" and "happy yard" both suggest a joyful, lively environment. The repetitiveness here is meant to emphasize the intense and abundant happiness of the speaker's childhood; the speaker returns again and again to the same memories, revealing their importance and power.

Stanzas 1 and 2 offer another example of parallelism as well. In stanza 1 the speaker says, "Time let me hail and climb / Golden in the heydays of his eyes." And in stanza 2, "Time let me play and be / Golden in the mercy of his means." These parallel phrases reiterate the speaker's sentiment that time temporarily grants people childhoods. But by changing up the wording, the speaker brings out different nuances in this sentiment. For instance, "heydays of his eyes" becomes "mercy of his means." Both of these phrases captures how childhood depends on time. The first, however, emphasizes "heydays" (i.e., the speaker's best days), while the second draws attention to how those days are limited.

Parallelism, of course, overlaps with other forms of [repetition](#) as well. [Anaphora](#)—such as in phrases like "it was all / Shining, it was Adam"—is a kind of parallelism, and is discussed separately in this guide. Similarly, line 19 begins "All the sun long" and line 25 "All the moon long." This interesting phrasing simply refers to the whole day and night, respectively, emphasizing the endlessness of the speaker's childhood joy and wonder—which fills every hour. The word "long" then later appears in "happy as the heart was long" in line 38, a phrase that recalls this earlier parallelism and blends the speaker himself with his environment; first the "day" was long, then the "moon," and now a part of the speaker himself, his "heart."

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs / About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,"
- **Line 4:** "Time let me hail and climb"
- **Line 5:** "Golden in the heydays of his eyes,"
- **Line 6:** "honoured among wagons"
- **Lines 10-11:** "And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns / About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,"
- **Line 13:** "Time let me play and be"
- **Line 14:** "Golden in the mercy of his means,"
- **Line 19:** "All the sun long"
- **Line 25:** "All the moon long"
- **Line 37:** "honoured among foxes and pheasants"
- **Line 42:** "And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows"
- **Line 46:** "Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me"



VOCABULARY

Easy (Line 1) - Relaxed; easygoing; comfortable.

Lilting (Line 2) - "Lilting" can mean both singing and a certain quality of some accents that seem to rise and fall in a songlike manner. Here, the speaker suggests that there's something songlike about the house.

Dingle (Line 3) - A forested valley.

Hail (Line 4) - *Hail* is a somewhat old-fashioned word that can either mean to call out to someone in greeting, or refer to where someone comes from. Here, it seems to involve a bit of both meanings. The speaker perhaps calls out from time's "eyes," and these eyes are also the speaker's home. The language is [figurative](#) to the point of being impossible to paraphrase here, but this definition gets at the gist of what it's suggesting.

Heydays (Line 5) - The best days of someone's life, of a particular place or group of people, etc.

Honoured (Line 6) - The British spelling of *honored*; revered, celebrated, popular.

Apple towns (Line 6) - Local towns with lots of apple orchards.

Below a time (Line 7) - A poetic phrase that suggests a time and place before *time* itself really got going—as at the beginning of the world or the beginning of the speaker's life.

Lordly (Line 7) - Like a lord—that is, a king or ruler, or even a god. The word has Christian overtones: God is often referred to as "the Lord."

Barley (Line 8) - A type of grass that produces an edible grain.



FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Fern Hill" is composed of six nine-line stanzas. These stanzas are structured syllabically, meaning that each stanza has a certain number of syllables in each line. This structure is covered in more detail in the [Meter](#) section of this guide. Formally, however, it's helpful to note how this structure leads to distinctively shaped stanzas, which undulate between long and short lines. The poem also indents certain lines. On the page, the poem seems to narrow down, then expand, then narrow down again.

Shaped forms like this have been used for centuries. Some shaped poems purposefully mimic what they are written about. For instance, in Renaissance poet George Herbert's "[Easter Wings](#)," the poem narrows and expands in the shape of wings. It could be possible to interpret Thomas's poem along these lines: hold the poem sideways, and it looks like a seismograph registering the highs and lows, the joyful energy and the moments of stillness, in the speaker's memories of childhood.

More often, though, poets use indentation and shape to accentuate different line lengths, so that the music and architecture of the poem is apparent just by looking at it. Thomas's poetry tends to fall more in this camp. In "Fern Hill," shape captures a sense of the speaker's energy and motion. Rather than remaining in one static block of uniform text (as for example, the [blank verse](#) of Wordsworth's "[The Prelude](#)," which also depicts childhood) the poem moves through a much more dynamic structure, channeling its energy through what almost looks like a series of funnels and echo chambers. (For another example of a poem that uses its shape to accentuate vivid memories of childhood, see instead Wordsworth's "[Ode: Intimations of Immortality](#).")

At the same time, the repetitive nature of the form captures how the speaker's memories continually circle back to the same [images](#) and impressions. Each stanza echoes the appearance of the previous stanza, just as the word "green" reverberates throughout the poem. So, the visual appearance of "Fern Hill" isn't just pretty, it conveys the poem's sense of energy, movement, and echoes directly to the reader.

METER

Rather than using a [meter](#) based on stress, the speaker bases the structure of the poem around syllable count. Each line contains a certain number of syllables, yielding a pattern of line-lengths for each stanza. For instance, the first two lines have 14 syllables each:

Now | as | I | was | young | and | ea- | sy | un- | der |
the ap- | ple boughs
A- | bout | the lil- | ting | house | and | hap- | py | as |

Windfall (Line 9) - Apples knocked down by the wind. Alternatively, a stroke of luck.

Mercy (Line 14) - Compassion; lenience. Usually, someone can *choose* to be merciful, but they don't *have* to be.

Means (Line 14) - Resources. In other words, time is merciful just as far as his resources allow.

Huntsman (Line 15) - A hunter.

Herdsmen (Line 15) - A shepherd or other animal herder.

Calves (Line 15) - Young cows.

Horn (Line 16) - A trumpet or similar instrument used in hunting or herding.

Sabbath (Line 17) - The holy day in Christianity and Judaism, commemorating God's day of rest after creating the world.

Hay fields (Lines 19-20) - Hay is a grass grown to feed to livestock, like horses. A hay field is where that grass grows.

Tunes (Line 20) - Music.

Bearing (Line 24) - Carrying.

Nightjars (Line 25) - Nocturnal birds that feed on insects.

Ricks (Line 26) - Stacks of hay.

Cock (Line 29) - A rooster.

Simple light (Line 33) - The speaker is discussing God's creation of light, which seemed simpler at the beginning of the world.

Spinning place (Line 34) - The earth, which spins. More specifically, the speaker may be referring to the Garden of Eden.

Spellbound (Line 34) - Mesmerized; fascinated.

Whinnying (Line 35) - Neighing.

Pheasants (Line 37) - A type of ground bird, similar to a chicken or turkey, plus a dash of peacock.

Gay (Line 37) - Happy.

Heedless (Line 40) - Not paying attention; recklessly carefree.

Trades (Line 42) - Skilled work or activity, such as carpentry or mechanics. Here, the speaker uses the word *cutely*, imagining that a child's imaginative tasks are like the skilled labor of an adult.

Tuneful (Line 43) - Musical.

Turning (Line 43) - Spinning; changing.

Grace (Line 45) - A state of being close to God's love.

Swallow (Line 47) - A type of small bird.

Thronged (Line 47) - Filled with crowds.

the | grass | was | green,

The first, second, and sixth stanzas each have following pattern of syllables:

14-14-9-6-9-14-14-7-9

While the third, fourth, and fifth stanzas have following pattern:

14-14-9-6-9-14-14-9-6

These patterns are almost identical except for the last two lines. In the second pattern, the stanza loses a syllable and the last line is one of its shortest. This creates a narrowing down effect, as if the poem is whittling away to nothing. Meanwhile, in the first pattern the poem seems to start expanding again, anticipating the long lines of the next stanzas.

Between the two, closely related patterns, the poem crafts a repetitive pattern with subtle variations. Just as reverberating music notes can create harmony or dissonance depending on their context, these echoing syllabic patterns capture the endless memories of childhood's joys, as well as the unpleasant realization that childhood, like this poem, must come to an end.

RHYME SCHEME

The speaker of "Fern Hill" pays very close attention to the patterns of sound between words. As a result, there are many moments of [slant rhyme](#), as well as some [internal rhyme](#). A subtle [rhyme scheme](#) arises out of the poem's distinct use of sound.

For instance, in the first stanza "green," "starry," "leaves," and "barley" all feature the long /ee/ sound, "boughs" and "towns" use the /ow/ sound, and "climb," "eyes," and "light" use the long /i/. This pattern isn't necessarily apparent at first glance.

However, such uses of slant rhyme create a feeling of some sort of structure in the background. So, with the caveat that some of the poem's rhymes are stronger and more noticeable than others, the rhyme scheme the poem is roughly as follows:

ABBCCABBC

Unlike a poem that uses [full rhymes](#) however, "Fern Hill" operates on a level that is much more intuitive, even subconscious. Its rhymes seem more like faintly heard echoes, or dimly recognized similarities. Not every stanza follows this scheme exactly, but for the most part it guides the poem.

This mimics the way the speaker's memory works: it isn't highly logical and rigid, but associative and free flowing. Like slant rhyme, the speaker's memory repeats images while also changing them slightly, as when "happy as the grass was grass" becomes "fire green as grass" becomes "happy as the heart was long." The poem's use of slant rhyme, then, contributes to the texture of the speaker's memory in general.



SPEAKER

The speaker of "Fern Hill" is someone who's intensely nostalgic for childhood. Although the poem takes its title from a real place—an aunt's farm that Thomas often visited a child—the poem itself is much broader than that. It could apply to anyone who had a childhood full of joyful experiences outdoors, and to anyone who wishes that childhood could have been longer.

In other words, the speaker could be anyone. Most of the images in the poem are pretty general: "grass," "trees," "fields," etc., so that nothing is too specific to a single childhood. That is, Thomas purposefully gets rid of singularly autobiographical details. For instance, it's not "Old Ned's horses" or something like that, but just "the horses." Additionally, many of these images have a [metaphorical](#) level to them, such as when the speaker refers to "the lilting house." This compares the wonderfulness of the house to singing, as if it's a singing house. By speaking in this way, the speaker seems to become metaphorical or [allegorical](#): someone who can represent anyone who has had similar experiences.

Furthermore, because the poem sometimes has the feel of a spell or a chant meant to conjure the lost joys of childhood, there's an additional sense of how it could be spoken by anyone. Anyone who wants to retrieve all those warm memories of being a kid can pick and the poem and begin reading it, and the poem will help them get in the right headspace to think about those memories.



SETTING

"Fern Hill" takes its title from an aunt's farm that Thomas often visited as a child. It might be said that the poem takes place on this farm, or on *a* farm—though it is more accurate to say the poem take's place in the speaker's memory of a farm. In this memory, the farm is devoid of any details that link it to a specific person's life. Rather, the speaker describes the farm in the most general terms possible. The speaker uses rich, [metaphorical](#), even surreal language. This kind of language makes the poem feel as if it takes place within the speaker's mind, as the speaker conjures all the glorious details of life as a kid.

As a result, the farm in this poem is a swirl of memories and impressions, of senses fused together so that houses sing and the sun is recreated every morning. Many of the key events are clearly not meant to be taken literally, as at the end of the poem, when the speaker describes how:

[...] time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my
hand,
In the moon that is always rising,

And how:

I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless
land.

In these dark, mysterious, and magical descriptions, the speaker invokes the kind of landscape that appears in fairy tales and folklore. In the speaker's memories Fern Hill isn't just a plain old farm, but a wonderful, fantastic kingdom brimming with magic and delight—and eventually sadness.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

The Welsh poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) was part of the second generation of modernists. This group of 20th-century writers, which included figures like [T.S. Eliot](#) and [Ezra Pound](#), sought new forms of expression. They wrote daring and expansive poems that tried to reinvent how people saw the world and what language could do.

Thomas was something of a prodigy. He published many of his intense, idiosyncratic poems when he was just a teenager. While his stylistic inventiveness places him among the modernists, his [pantheistic](#) feelings about nature and his passionate sincerity also mark him as a descendent of 19th-century Romantic poets like [William Blake](#) and [John Keats](#) (both of whom he read enthusiastically). He also admired his contemporaries [W.B. Yeats](#) and [W.H. Auden](#), who, like him, often wrote of the "mystery" behind everyday life (though in very different ways).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Thomas published "Fern Hill" in October 1945, one month after the end of WWII. Whether intentionally or not, then, the poem reacts to the horrors of the Second World War with nostalgia for the simpler days of childhood. WWII saw fire-bombing all over Europe, millions killed in genocidal death camps, and the dropping of the atomic bomb. It was a dark time for the world, heralding the worst aspects of modernity. "Fern Hill" adamantly retreats from the darkness, basking in the magic and innocence of childhood, a time before the true horrors of the world were apparent.

"Fern Hill" is based on Fernhill, an aunt's farm in Wales that Thomas often visited as a child. Thomas grew up in Wales, and

although he spent much time abroad—particularly in New York City—his Welsh heritage always remained important to him. Thomas often returned to his memory of growing up in Wales as material for his writing, weaving nostalgia for that time with his distinctive lyrical voice.



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [More on Thomas's Life](#) — A succinct biography from the Academy of American Poets. (<https://poets.org/poet/dylan-thomas>)
- [The Dylan Thomas Center](#) — Additional resources from the Dylan Thomas Center in Wales. (<http://www.dylanthomas.com/>)
- [A Biography of Thomas](#) — A more detailed biography of Dylan Thomas from the Poetry Foundation. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/dylan-thomas>)
- [Thomas at the BBC](#) — Resources on Dylan Thomas from the BBC, with whom Thomas often recorded readings. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01s4d2y>)
- [Thomas Reading "Fern Hill"](#) — Dylan Thomas reads "Fern Hill" in his deep, distinctive voice. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNWBVIBjQ8&t>)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER DYLAN THOMAS POEMS

- [A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London](#)
- [Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night](#)
- [Poem in October](#)



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